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ABSTRACT

Brittle paper, cheap bindings, mistreatment, and poor storage conditions are threatening to destroy thousands of scholarly documents throughout the United States unless preservation activities are successfully incorporated into all levels of library operations. In order for the preservation and access to information movement to succeed, there must be grassroots involvement, which can begin with school and public libraries. This digest identifies three key areas into which preservation activities fall: awareness, judgement, and advocacy. In the first of four sections methods that can be used to capture the content of brittle books are identified and examples of several national preservation initiatives and programs are presented. The second sections lists eight methods that libraries can use to begin their preservation activities. Highlighted in the third section are ways in which libraries can communicate their commitment to preservation to their financial supporters, vendors, and patrons. The final section presents an overview of the current national preservation agenda, including three of the Commission on Preservation and Access' objectives that are of interest to public and school libraries. (MAB)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources
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ERIC DIGEST

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A Practical Guide to Preservation in School and Public Libraries

by Mary Alice Brennan

This digest is based on *A Practical Guide to Preservation in School and Public Libraries*, by Maxine K. Sitts

It has been conservatively estimated that 25% of all volumes in North American research libraries—or 78 million—are turning to dust because of brittle paper. Brittle paper and other agents (e.g., cheap bindings, mistreatment, and poor storage conditions) are threatening to destroy thousands of scholarly documents throughout the nation unless preservation activities are successfully incorporated into all levels of library operations. No longer can preservation be the sole responsibility of public agencies and private institutions; in order for the preservation and access to information movement to succeed, it must have grassroots involvement. Such involvement can begin with school and public library departments, staff members, and patrons. This digest provides some starting points for beginning preservation activities in libraries within a framework of three key essentials: awareness, judgment, and advocacy.

Awareness

The library and archival profession has long advocated intellectual freedom and deplored censorship. Yet the content of many scholarly resources is at risk of censorship due to the inherent fragility of their materials, poor storage conditions, and mishandling. Documents that have been printed on acid paper will become brittle and disintegrate over time due to weakening of the paper fibers. However, a variety of methods can be used to capture the content of brittle books before they crumble. Microfilming can immediately preserve a document's content, while paper deacidification can stabilize and halt the disintegration of acidic paper. Materials can now be printed on alkaline, or non-acidic, paper at a cost comparable to printing on acid paper. By enacting these and other preservation activities, libraries can maximize the life of library materials and stretch their acquisition dollars.

Public and school libraries can both contribute to, and benefit from, the vast amount of preservation information that is being assembled at national, state, and regional levels. The American Library Association (ALA) has been responsible for heightening visibility about preservation and has spearheaded a number of preservation initiatives. One notable example was a 1989 public awareness campaign whose preservation theme, "Going, Going, Gone," emphasized the deteriorating condition of many library collections. Preservation was also a theme at ALA's 1990 Midwinter and Annual Conferences as well as a major focus of a number of ALA sponsored publications and workshops. ALA president Patricia Wilson Berger also identified preservation as one of three critical issues during her 1989-90 term. This concern was echoed by 1990 ALA president Peggy Sullivan. In an article providing excellent insight into the preservation role of school and public librarians, Sullivan states:

> No one knows better than we [librarians] that the preservation problem in libraries is only partly about books, but must also include films and prints and maps and all the broad range of media that are part of our stock in trade. We are entering a new era where we need not only to be more aware of that stock and its place in history, but [to be] active in our own position as knowledgeable preservers. (p. 19)

Recently, preservation programs have been developed by such state and regional groups as the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), Research Libraries Group (RLG), Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET), Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), and the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA).

Judgment: What To Do, When and How

A number of resources and guides from library associations, professional organizations, and colleagues can assist in the initiation of a library preservation program. Such resources can help a library to establish its priorities, select areas where its actions will have the most impact, and budget accordingly. Depending on its individual needs, a library can approach preservation through any of the following methods:

1. Avoiding environmental dangers by adjusting temperature, humidity, and light levels;
2. Alleviating stress on books' hinge areas by ensuring that all books stand upright and do not lean;
3. Extending the circulation life of books by routinely tightening hinges on returned books and switching to preservationally sound repair supplies and techniques;
4. Choosing more flexible types of binding such as double-fan adhesive or sewing through the fold;
5. Allocating sufficient funds and staff skill and time to take care of local historical materials;
6. Properly storing and caring for magnetic, audio, and video media;
7. Having on-hand a list of contacts and resources in the event of fire, smoke, or water damage; and
8. Installing detectors to help prevent these emergencies.

Advocacy: How To Influence

Libraries that have made a commitment to preservation can benefit most by communicating that decision to their financial supporters, vendors, and patrons. One way to assemble

support for preservation activities is to justify the initial expense in terms of the long-term benefits that will accrue from the initial investments. The Wellesley (Massachusetts) Free Public Library employed such a tactic. When staff at this library discovered that one-third of their budget was going to repair books with cracked spines, poor bindings, and missing textblocks, they decided to approach the collection as a capital asset in which books were objects requiring ongoing care. As a result, Wellesley's collection maintenance costs are now an annual capital expenditure of the community (Reynolds, 1990).

An exchange of viewpoints is also essential between the library and archive communities and paper manufacturers, printers, binders, and publishers. Dialogue among these groups can encourage the development of longer-lasting paper and better-bound books, and can serve to educate vendors about the need for alternative means of preservation.

The library's local community is yet another forum for advocacy. A public relations campaign or bulletin board display, as well as the demonstration of good staff preservation habits, are effective ways to educate patrons about the importance of preservation. A number of brochures and accompanying materials based on the "Going, Going, Gone" conference theme are available from the American Library Association and can be used to begin such a grassroots campaign.

National Preservation Agenda

The research and university library community has recognized the need to carry out coordinated preservation and access initiatives on a national level. To help accomplish this goal, the Commission on Preservation and Access, a private, non-profit organization, was formed in 1986. Some of the Commission's work of most interest to public and school librarians includes the following:

1. Coordinating a cooperative international database of bibliographic records for preserved items;
2. Incorporating modern computer and telecommunications technologies into the work of preservation and access; and
3. Developing affordable strategies to preserve archival materials.

The Federal government has also shown support for preservation efforts in recent years. The Brittle Books program, operated by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Office of Preservation, has begun to microfilm over three million embrittled books and is seeking to improve access to information through the formation of inexpensive, rapid distribution systems. This 20-year program involves some of the largest U.S. academic libraries and the Library of Congress.

In Fiscal Year 1989, the NEH announced a $15 million grant program for preservation projects that will ultimately preserve over 167,000 endangered volumes. Federal support is also available under Title II-C through the U.S. Department of Education's Library Program. Preservation received emphasis for the first time in the 1990 five-year reauthorization of the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). Finally, Title III of the Interlibrary Cooperation and Resources Sharing Act provides financial support for statewide preservation cooperative planning.

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